Too Many Smoking Guns to Ignore Israel, American Jews, and the War on Iraq By Bill and Kathleen Christison CounterPunch January 25, 2003
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Most of the vociferously pro-Israeli neo-conservative policymakers in the Bush administration make no effort to hide the fact that at least part of their intention in promoting war against Iraq (and later perhaps against Syria, Iran, Hezbollah, and the Palestinians) is to guarantee Israel's security by eliminating its greatest military threats, forging a regional balance of power overwhelmingly in Israel's favor, and in general creating a more friendly atmosphere for Israel in the Middle East. Yet, despite the neo-cons' own openness, a great many of those on the left who oppose going to war with Iraq and oppose the neo-conservative doctrines of the Bush administration nonetheless utterly reject any suggestion that Israel is pushing the United States into war, or is cooperating with the U.S., or even hopes to benefit by such a war. Anyone who has the temerity to suggest any Israeli instigation of, or even involvement in, Bush administration war planning is inevitably labeled somewhere along the way as an anti-Semite. Just whisper the word "domination" anywhere in the vicinity of the word "Israel," as in "U.S.-Israeli domination of the Middle East" or "the U.S. drive to assure global domination and guarantee security for Israel," and some leftist who otherwise opposes going to war against Iraq will trot out charges of promoting the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the old czarist forgery that asserted a Jewish plan for world domination.
This is tiresome, to put it mildly. So it's useful to put forth the evidence for the assertion of Israeli complicity in Bush administration planning for war with Iraq, which is voluminous, as the following recitation will show. Much of what is presented below could be classified as circumstantial, but much is from the mouths of the horses themselves, either the neo-con planners or Israeli government officials, and much of it is evidence that, even if Israel is not actively pushing for war, many Israelis expect to benefit from it, and this despite their fear that a war will bring down on Israel a shower of Iraqi missiles.
The evidence below is listed chronologically, except for two items grouped separately at the end. Although deletions have been made for the sake of brevity, and emphasis has been added to occasional phrases and sentences, no editorial narrative has been added. The evidence speaks for itself.
Benjamin Netanyahu's government comes in with a new set of ideas. While there are those who will counsel continuity, Israel has the opportunity to make a clean break; it can forge a peace process and strategy based on an entirely new intellectual foundation, one that restores strategic initiative. To secure the nation's streets and borders in the immediate future, Israel can [among other steps] work closely with Turkey and Jordan to contain, destabilize, and roll-back some of its most dangerous threats. This implies a clean break from the slogan, 'comprehensive peace' to a traditional concept of strategy based on balance of power. Israel can shape its strategic environment, in cooperation with Turkey and Jordan, by weakening, containing, and even rolling back Syria. This effort can focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq, an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right, as a means of foiling Syria's regional ambitions. Jordan has challenged Syria's regional ambitions recently by suggesting the restoration of the Hashemites in Iraq. Since Iraq's future could affect the strategic balance in the Middle East profoundly, it would be understandable that Israel has an interest in supporting the Hashemites in their efforts to redefine Iraq. Israel's new agenda can signal a clean break by abandoning a policy which allowed strategic retreat, by reestablishing the principle of preemption, rather than retaliation alone and by ceasing to absorb blows to the nation without response. Israel's new strategic agenda can shape the regional environment in ways that grant Israel the room to refocus its energies back to where they are most needed: to rejuvenate its national idea. Ultimately, Israel can do more than simply manage the Arab-Israeli conflict though war. No amount of weapons or victories will grant Israel the peace it seeks. When Israel is on a sound economic footing, and is free, powerful, and healthy internally, it will no longer simply manage the Arab-Israeli conflict; it will transcend it. As a senior Iraqi opposition leader said recently: 'Israel must rejuvenate and revitalize its moral and intellectual leadership. It is an important, if not the most important, element in the history of the Middle East.' Israel-proud, wealthy, solid, and strong-would be the basis of a truly new and peaceful Middle East.
– "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm," policy paper written for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, mid-1996, under the auspices of an Israeli think tank, the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies. Authors included Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, and David Wurmser, now all policymakers in or policy advisers to the Bush administration.
Iraq's future will profoundly affect the strategic balance in the Middle East. The battle to dominate and define Iraq is, by extension, the battle to dominate the balance of power in the Levant over the long run. Iraq tried to take over its neighbor, Kuwait, a catastrophic mistake that has accelerated Iraq's descent into internal chaos. This chaos has created a vacuum in an area geostrategically central, and rich with human and natural resources. The vacuum tempts Iraq's neighbors to intervene, especially Syria, which is also driven to control the region. Iraq's chaos and Syria's efforts simultaneously provide opportunities for the Jordanian monarchy. Jordan is best suited to manage the tribal politics that will define the Levant in the wake of failed secular-Arab nationalism. If Jordan wins, then Syria would be isolated and surrounded by a new pro-western Jordanian-Israeli-Iraqi-Turkish bloc. It would be prudent for the United States and Israel to abandon the quest for 'comprehensive peace,' including its 'land for peace' provision with Syria, since it locks the United States into futile attempts to prop-up local tyrants and the unnatural states underneath them. Instead, the United States and Israel can use this competition over Iraq to improve the regional balance of power in favor of regional friends like Jordan.
– "Coping with Crumbling States: A Western and Israeli Balance of Power Strategy for the Levant," policy
paper written for an Israeli think tank, the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies, December 1996, by David Wurmser, now a State Department official in the Bush administration.
In the [occupied] territories, the Arab world, and in Israel, Bush's support for Sharon is being credited to the pro-Israel lobby, meaning Jewish money and the Christian right.[In April 2002] state department professionals convinced Bush that it was important to quell the violence in the territories before assaulting Iraq. The U.S. military supported that view, emphasizing the critical importance of the ground bases in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, for the success of the mission. But according to a well-placed American source, the weather vane turned.Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and Rumsfeld's deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, asked Bush what kind of coalition-shmoalition he needed to win the war in Afghanistan. They calmed his concerns by saying there's no chance the situation in the territories will shake the regimes of Mubarak in Egypt and the Abdullahs in Jordan and Saudi Arabia.Last Saturday [April 20], the president convened his advisors in Camp David, for another discussion of the crisis in the territories and Iraq. They decided to sit on the fence.
– Israeli commentator Akiva Eldar, Haaretz, April 26, 2002
"It echoes the hawks in the Bush administration, but Israel has its own agenda in backing a US attack on Iraq. As Egypt and other Arab allies issue vehement warnings to dissuade Washington, Israel's fear is that the US will back off. 'If the Americans do not do this now,' said Israeli Deputy Defense Minister and Labor Party member Weizman Shiry on Wednesday, 'it will be harder to do it in the future. In a year or two, Saddam Hussein will be further along in developing weapons of mass destruction. It is a world interest, but especially an American interest to attack Iraq. And as deputy defense minister, I can tell you that the United States will receive any assistance it needs from Israel,' he added. Viewed through the eyes of Israel's hawkish leaders, however, a US strike is not about Iraq only. Decisionmakers believe it will strengthen Israel's hand on the Palestinian front and throughout the region. Deputy Interior Minister Gideon Ezra suggested this week that a US attack on Iraq will help Israel impose a new order, sans Arafat, in the Palestinian territories. 'The more aggressive the attack is, the more it will help Israel against the Palestinians. The understanding would be that what is good to do in Iraq, is also good for here,' said Ezra. He said a US strike would 'undoubtedly deal a psychological blow' to the Palestinians.Yuval Steinitz, a Likud party member of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, says he sees another advantage for Israel. The installation of a pro-American government in Iraq would help Israel vis-a-vis another enemy: Syria. 'After Iraq is taken by US troops and we see a new regime installed as in Afghanistan, and Iraqi bases become American bases, it will be very easy to pressure Syria to stop supporting terrorist organizations like Hizbullah and Islamic Jihad, to allow the Lebanese army to dismantle Hizbullah, and maybe to put an end to the Syrian occupation in Lebanon,' he says. 'If this happens we will really see a new Middle East. It might be enough not to invade Syria but just to have an American or UN blockade so that no one can ship weapons to it,' Steinitz adds. Mr. Ezra predicts a US strike would 'calm down the entire region' by eliminating 'the extremism of Saddam.'"
– Ben Lynfield, Christian Science Monitor, August 30, 2002
As the Bush administration debates going to war against Iraq, its most hawkish members are pushing a sweeping vision for the Middle East that sees the overthrow of President Saddam Hussein of Iraq as merely a first step in the region's transformation. The argument for reshaping the political landscape in the Mideast has been pushed for years by some Washington think tanks and in hawkish circles. It is now being considered as a possible US policy with the ascent of key hard-liners in the administration, from Paul Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith in the Pentagon to John Hannah and Lewis Libby on the vice president's staff and John Bolton in the State Department, analysts and officials say. Iraq, the hawks argue, is just the first piece of the puzzle. After an ouster of Hussein, they say, the United States will have more leverage to act against Syria and Iran, will be in a better position to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and will be able to rely less on Saudi oil. The thinking does not represent official US policy. But increasingly the argument has served as a justification for a military attack against Iraq, and elements of the strategy have emerged in speeches by administration officials, most prominently Vice President Dick Cheney. A powerful corollary of the strategy is that a pro-US Iraq would make the region safer for Israel and, indeed, its staunchest proponents are ardent supporters of the Israeli right-wing. Administration officials, meanwhile, have increasingly argued that the onset of an Iraq allied to the US would give the administration more sway in bringing about a settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though Cheney and others have offered few details on precisely how. In its broadest terms, the advocates argue that a democratic Iraq would unleash similar change elsewhere in the Arab world.' Everyone will flip out, starting with the Saudis,' said Meyrav Wurmser, director of the Center for Middle East Policy at the Hudson Institute in Washington [and another author of the 1996 policy paper written for Israel, above]. 'It will send shock waves throughout the Arab world. Look, we already are pushing for democracy in the Palestinian Authority, though not with a huge amount of success, and we need a little bit more of a heavy-handed approach,' she said. 'But if we can get a democracy in the Palestinian Authority, democracy in Iraq, get the Egyptians to improve their human rights and open up their system, it will be a spectacular change. After a war with Iraq, then you really shape the region.' – John Donnelly and Anthony Shadid, Boston Globe, September 10, 2002 "Slowly, President Bush's war plan against Iraq is emerging from the thick fog. At first it looked like a collection of hazy slogans, but gradually it is becoming clear that it has definite, if hidden, aims. The war plan of the Bushies makes sense only if the US leadership is ready (more than that, is actually longing) for the occupation of Iraq in order to remain there for many, many years. But in the eyes of Bush and his advisers, this is a very worthwhile investment that would yield immense benefits. Among others:

The main objective of the American economy (and therefore of American policy) is the oil of the Caspian Sea.
The existence of a secure American base in the heart of the Arab world will also enable Washington to bully all the Arab regimes, lest they stray from the straight and narrow.
The new situation will destroy the last remnants of Arab independence. Even today, almost all the Arab countries are dependent on America.

A massive American physical presence in their midst will put an end to any pretense of Arab power and unity. A grandiose, world-embracing, yet simple and logical design. What does it remind me of?In the early 80's, I heard about several plans like this from Ariel Sharon (which I published at the time). His head was full of grand designs for restructuring the Middle East, the creation of an Israeli 'security zone' from Pakistan to Central Africa, the overthrow of regimes and installing others in their stead, moving a whole people (the Palestinians) and so forth. I can't help it, but the winds blowing now in Washington remind me of Sharon. I have absolutely no proof that the Bushies got their ideas from him, even if all of them seem to have been mesmerized by him. But the style is the same, a mixture of megalomania, creativity, arrogance, ignorance and superficiality. An explosive mixture. Sharon's grand design floundered, as we know. The bold flights of imagination and the superficial logic did not help; -Sharon simply did not understand the real currents of history. I fear that the band of Bush, Cheney, Rumsfield, Rice, Wolfowitz, Perle and all the other little Sharons are suffering from the same syndrome. Sharon may believe that he will be the big winner of such an American move, though history may show that he brought a historical disaster on us. He may succeed in exploiting the ensuing anarchy in order to drive the Palestinians out of the country. But within a few years Israel could find itself surrounded by a new Middle East, a region full of hatred, dreaming of revenge, driven by religious and nationalist fanaticism. And in the end, the Americans will go home. We will be left here alone. But people like Bush and Sharon do not march to the beat of history. They are listening to a different drummer."
– Israeli peace activist Uri Avnery, CounterPunch.org, September 10, 2002
Ever since the Bush administration ordered the CIA to nurture the exiled Iraqis, nothing happens to them by accident. [Jordanian] Prince Hassan didn't just happen to drop in [on a meeting of Iraqi exiles in London] because he was in town. The Hashemite dynasty has never given up its dream to revive the Iraqi throne. It could be a great job for Hassan, whose older brother [the late King Hussein] denied him the Jordanian kingdom at the last minute. It's true that restoring a monarchy in Iraq does not exactly fit the Bush administration's vision of a democratic Middle East. But there are signs that it fits some old dreams of a few of the key strategists around the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld triangle running America's Iraq policy. A few weeks ago, Richard Perle invited the Pentagon chiefs to a meeting with researchers from a Washington think tank. According to information that reached a former top official in the Israeli security services, the researchers showed two slides to the Pentagon officials. The first was a depiction of the three goals in the war on terror and the democratization of the Middle East: Iraq, a tactical goal; Saudi Arabia, a strategic goal; and Egypt, the great prize. The triangle in the next slide was no less interesting: Palestine is Israel, Jordan is Palestine, and Iraq is the Hashemite Kingdom.
– Israeli commentator Akiva Eldar, Haaretz, October 1, 2002
"The summer of 1993 saw the emergence of two contradictory paths concerning Israel and its place in the Middle East. The signing of the Oslo agreement raised hopes for Israel's integration into a web of political, security and economic cooperation with its Arab neighbors. At the same time, Harvard Prof. Samuel Huntington published his essay, 'The Clash of Civilizations,' in which he argued that the conflicts around the world would no longer be over ideology, but over culture instead. 'Islam has bloody borders,' Huntington wrote, counting Israel as a 'Western creation' on the fault lines of the conflict, along with Kashmir and Bosnia. The idea was accepted enthusiastically by the Israeli right wing. It also had some supporters on the left, most noticeably Ehud Barak, who described Israel as a Western fortress in the region, 'a villa in the jungle.' As of now, it appears that the argument was settled in favor of the clash of civilizations theory, which has taken over the political and security establishment in Israel. The appeal of the clash of civilizations theory is also expressed in the Israeli enthusiasm for the expected American assault on Iraq, in the hope of showing the Arabs who's the boss in the region. Israel is the only country to absolutely support the American decision, and has urged it to act, and quickly. The tangible result of the change in consciousness has been deepening Israel's dependence on American defense and economic support. Sharon led that policy. The same Sharon says there are no free lunches in policy and is now begging for aid from Washington, trying to point the American cannon in the direction of its next target after Iraq."
– Israeli correspondent Aluf Benn, Haaretz, November 14, 2002
The embrace of U.S. President George W. Bush is Ariel Sharon's chief asset as he vies for another term of office as prime minister. Sharon is finding it hard to show any achievements during his 20 months in power. The only card left in his hand is the diplomatic card, as personified by Israel's good relations with the White House, and all of Sharon's campaign revolves around it. Sharon and his cronies are now asking the voters for an extended period of grace, and are promising that next year will be the year that counts. All of their hopes and expectations are pointed toward Washington: an American attack on Iraq is seen as the lever which can extricate Israel from its economic, security and social quagmire. It is hoped that the removal of Saddam Hussein from power will set in motion a 'domino effect,' will end the Palestinian Intifada, bring about the end of Yasser Arafat's regime and eradicate the threat to Israel from Iran, Syria and Hezbollah.
– Israeli correspondent Aluf Benn, Haaretz, November 18, 2002
"To understand the genesis of this extraordinary [US global] ambition, it is also necessary to grasp the moral, cultural and intellectual world of American nationalism in which it has taken shape. This nationalism existed long before last September, but it has been inflamed by those attacks and, equally dangerously, it has become even more entwined with the nationalism of the Israeli Right. The banal propaganda portrayal of Saddam as a crazed and suicidal dictator plays well on the American street, but I don't believe that it is a view shared by the Administration. Rather, their intention is partly to retain an absolute certainty of being able to defend the Gulf against an Iraqi attack, but, more important, to retain for the US and Israel a free hand for intervention in the Middle East as a whole. From the point of view of Israel, the Israeli lobby and their representatives in the Administration, the apparent benefits of such a free hand are clear enough. For the group around Cheney, the single most important consideration is guaranteed and unrestricted access to cheap oil, controlled as far as possible at its source. [A]s alternative technologies develop, they could become a real threat to the oil lobby, which, like the Israeli lobby, is deeply intertwined with the Bush Administration. War with Iraq can therefore be seen as a satisfactory outcome for both lobbies.[W]hat the Administration hopes is that by crushing another middle-sized state at minimal military cost, all the other states in the Muslim world will be terrified into full co-operation in tracking down and handing over suspected terrorists, and into forsaking the Palestinian cause.The idea, in other words, is to scare these states not only into helping with the hunt for al-Qaida, but into capitulating to the US and, more important, Israeli agendas in the Middle East.' The road to Middle East peace lies through Baghdad' is a line that's peddled by the Bush Administration and the Israeli lobby. It is just possible that some members of the Administration really believe that by destroying Israel's most powerful remaining enemy they will gain such credit with Israelis and the Israeli lobby that they will be able to press compromises on Israel. But this is certainly not what public statements by members of the Administration, let alone those of its Likud allies in Israel, suggest.It's far more probable, therefore, that most members of the Bush and Sharon Administrations hope that the crushing of Iraq will so demoralise the Palestinians, and so reduce wider Arab support for them, that it will be possible to force them to accept a Bantustan settlement bearing no resemblance to independent statehood.From the point of view of the Arab-Israeli conflict, war with Iraq also has some of the character of a Flucht nach vorn, an 'escape forwards,' on the part of the US Administration. On the one hand, it has become clear that the conflict is integrally linked to everything else that happens in the Middle East, and therefore cannot simply be ignored, as the Bush Administration tried to do during its first year in office. On the other hand, even those members of the American political elite who have some understanding of the situation and a concern for justice are terrified of confronting Israel and the Israeli lobby in the ways which would be necessary to bring any chance of peace. When the US demands 'democracy' in the Palestinian territories before it will re-engage in the peace process it is in part, and fairly cynically, trying to get out of this trap."
– Anatol Lieven, Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, London Review of Books, December 2002
"If you want to know what the administration has in mind for Iraq, here's a hint: It has less to do with weapons of mass destruction than with implementing an ambitious U.S. vision to redraw the map of the Middle East. The new map would be drawn with an eye to two main objectives: controlling the flow of oil and ensuring Israel's continued regional military superiority. [Patrick] Clawson [a policy analyst with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy], whose institute enjoys close ties with the Bush administration, was candid during a Capitol Hill forum on a post-Hussein Iraq in 1999: 'U.S. oil companies would have an opportunity to make significant profits,' he said. 'We should not be embarrassed about the commercial advantages that would come from a re-integration of Iraq into the world economy.'...But taking over Iraq and remaking the global oil market is not necessarily the endgame. The next steps, favored by hard-liners determined to elevate Israeli security above all other U.S. foreign policy goals, would be to destroy any remaining perceived threat to the Jewish state: namely, the regimes in Syria and Iran. In 1998, [David] Wurmser, now in the State Department, told the Jewish newspaper Forward that if [Iraqi opposition leader] Ahmad Chalabi were in power and extended a no-fly, no-drive zone in northern Iraq, it would provide the crucial piece for an anti-Syria, anti-Iran bloc. 'It puts Scuds out of the range of Israel and provides the geographic beachhead between Turkey, Jordan and Israel,' he said. 'This should anchor the Middle East pro-Western coalition.' [Richard] Perle, in the same 1998 article, told Forward that a coalition of pro-Israeli groups was 'at the forefront with the legislation with regard to Iran. One can only speculate what it might accomplish if it decided to focus its attention on Saddam Hussein.'Now, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has joined the call against Tehran, arguing in a November interview with the Times of London that the U.S. should shift its focus to Iran 'the day after' the Iraq war ends.[T]he hard-liners in and around the administration seem to know in their hearts that the battle to carve up the Middle East would not be won without the blood of Americans and their allies. 'One can only hope that we turn the region into a caldron, and faster, please,' [Michael] Ledeen preached to the choir at National Review Online last August. 'That's our mission in the war against terror.'"
– UC Berkeley journalism professor Sandy Tolan, Los Angeles Times, December 1, 2002
The immediate and laudatory purpose of a United States military campaign against Iraq is to stamp out the regime of Saddam Hussein, the world's most psychopathic ruler, and to strike a blow against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. As such this is a welcome move from Israel's standpoint, whatever the consequences. [T]he American planners, who display considerable disdain for most of the Muslim and Arab worlds, seem to think that the forcible removal of Saddam's evil regime and the consequent implantation of an American military presence in the wild Middle East will project a civilizing or liberating influence. They are not alone; not a few progressive Arab thinkers (and many Israelis) appear to welcome this American deus ex machina into the region.
– Israeli military/political analyst, Yossi Alpher, bitterlemons.org, December 23, 2002
I think that the conquest of Iraq will really create a New Middle East. Put differently: the Middle East will enter a new age. For the time being this will happen without us, as long as there's no Palestinian solution. Many peoples in the region are ruled by frightened dictators who have to decide whom to fear more, the terrorists or the war against terrorism. Asad fears for his legitimacy due to the war against terrorism. Arafat can also lose his legitimacy. The Saudis gave money for terrorism due to fear. No terrorist-sponsoring country is democratic. In those countries [that support terrorism] there will be revolutions. Television will play a role like in the collapse of the Iron Curtain. This will happen with the Palestinians, too. The Arab world is ripe for internal revolution like the USSR and China in the past decade.
– Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, bitterlemons.org, December 23, 2002
Republican Sen. Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, having just returned from a week-long fact-finding trip to the Middle East, addressed the Chicago Council of Foreign Relations Dec. 16 and said out loud what is whispered on Capitol Hill: 'The road to Arab-Israeli peace will not likely go through Baghdad, as some may claim.' The 'some' are led by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. In private conversation with Hagel and many other members of Congress, the former general leaves no doubt that the greatest U.S. assistance to Israel would be to overthrow Saddam Hussein's Iraqi regime. That view is widely shared inside the Bush administration, and is a major reason why U.S. forces today are assembling for war. As the US gets ready for war, its standing in Islam, even among longtime allies, stands low. Yet, the Bush administration has tied itself firmly to Gen. Sharon and his policies. In private conversation, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice has insisted that Hezbollah, not al Qaeda, is the world's most dangerous terrorist organization. How could that be, considering al Qaeda's global record of mass carnage? In truth, Hezbollah is the world's most dangerous terrorist organization from Israel's standpoint. While viciously anti-American in rhetoric, the Lebanon-based Hezbollah is focused on the destruction of Israel. Thus, Rice's comments suggest that the U.S. war against terrorism, accused of being Iraq-centric, actually is Israel-centric. That ties George W. Bush to Arik Sharon.What is widely perceived as an indissoluble Bush-Sharon bond creates tension throughout Islam.On balance, war with Iraq may not be inevitable but is highly probable. That it looks like Sharon's war disturbs Americans such as Chuck Hagel, who have no use for Saddam Hussein but worry about the background of an attack against him.
– Robert Novak, Washington Post, December 26, 2002
With a scandal chipping away at his government, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon changed the subject to Iraq this week and found his country eager to listen.Mr. Sharon's remarks seemed to strike a chord with Israeli voters, who are concerned about an Iraqi attack and still traumatized by the events of 1991, when 39 Iraqi missiles landed in the country. To some Israeli commentators, the week's events highlighted the lingering effects of the first war with Iraq, and how Mr. Sharon, an incumbent prime minister with an unmatched reputation for toughness, is the likely beneficiary of any debate over a second one. 'What happened in 1991 is an unfinished chapter,' said Asher Arian, a senior fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute in Jerusalem. 'The Israeli public feels it has a score to settle. When Sharon talks about Iraq, it has enormous resonance. 'Part of the explanation for the positive reception of Mr. Sharon is the genuine fear that many Israelis harbor of an Iraqi attack. The other factor, commentators here say, is the looming memory of the Persian Gulf war of 1991. For Israelis, proud of their military successes over the years, that war was a different experience. At American insistence, they endured Iraqi missile attacks without fighting back. 'The gulf war was the first time in Israel's history where people had to hide and run way,' said Itzhak Galnoor, former commissioner of the Israeli civil service. 'For Israelis to be helpless, that was very traumatic.'
– Dexter Filkins, New York Times, December 29, 2002
Authors' note: Given the prevailing atmosphere in the United States for debate on Israel, the frequency with which critics of Israel are accused of malicious ethnic motives, and the widespread skittishness about associating Israel or American Jews with war planning against Iraq, the following items are of particular interest. The first of these items reports a clear Jewish effort to suppress any evidence of Jewish support for war. The second is evidence, from a non-Jewish perspective, of the effect of the silence imposed on critics of Israel.

A group of U.S. political consultants has sent pro-Israel leaders a memo urging them to keep quiet while the Bush administration pursues a possible war with Iraq. The six-page memo was sent by the Israel Project, a group funded by American Jewish organizations and individual donors. Its authors said the main audience was American Jewish leaders, but much of the memo's language is directed toward Israelis.The memo reflects a concern that involvement by Israel in a U.S.-Iraq confrontation could hurt Israel's standing in American public opinion and undermine international support for a hard line against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. 'Let American politicians fight it out on the floor of Congress and in the media,' the memo said. 'Let the nations of the world argue in front of the UN. Your silence allows everyone to focus on Iraq rather than Israel.' An Israeli diplomat in Washington said the Israeli government did not request or fund the efforts of the Israel Project and that Israeli leaders were unlikely to follow all the advice. 'These are professional public relations people,' the diplomat said. 'There's also a political-diplomatic side.' The Iraq memo was issued in the past few weeks and labeled 'confidential property of the Israel Project,' which is led by Democratic consultant Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi with help from Democratic pollster Stan Greenberg and Republican pollsters Neil Newhouse and Frank Luntz. Several of the consultants have advised Israeli politicians, and the group aired a pro-Israel ad earlier this year. 'If your goal is regime change, you must be much more careful with your language because of the potential backlash,' said the memo, titled 'Talking About Iraq.' It added: 'You do not want Americans to believe that the war on Iraq is being waged to protect Israel rather than to protect America.' In particular, the memo urged Israelis to pipe down about the possibility of Israel responding to an Iraqi attack. 'Such certainty may be Israeli policy, but asserting it publicly and so overtly will not sit well with a majority of Americans because it suggests a pre-determined outcome rather than a measured approach,' it said.
– Dana Milbank, Washington Post, November 27, 2002
[We need to] demystify the question of why we have become unable to discuss our relationship with the current government of Israel. Whether the actions taken by that government constitute self-defense or a particularly inclusive form of self-immolation remains an open question. The question of course has a history.This open question, and its history, are discussed rationally and with considerable intellectual subtlety in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.Where the question is not discussed rationally, where in fact the question is rarely discussed at all, since so few of us are willing to see our evenings turn toxic, is in New York and Washington and in those academic venues where the attitudes and apprehensions of New York and Washington have taken hold. The president of Harvard recently warned that criticisms of the current government of Israel could be construed as 'anti-Semitic in their effect if not their intent.' The very question of the US relationship with Israel, in other words, has come to be seen as unraisable, potentially lethal, the conversational equivalent of an unclaimed bag on a bus. We take cover. We wait for the entire subject to be defused, safely insulated behind baffles of invective and counterinvective. Many opinions are expressed. Few are allowed to develop. Even fewer change.
– Joan Didion, New York Review of Books, January 16, 2003